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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 000227

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL HO

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ZELAYA DISCUSSES REGIONAL ISSUES

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b & d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 30 the Ambassador met with President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya to review regional developments and the current state of bilateral relations. Zelaya continued to attempt to blame the Costa Ricans for his non-attendance at the meeting with Vice President Biden in San Jose. However, he stressed that he had instructed Vice President Aristides Mejia to be a positive and constructive participant in the meeting. He described our common cooperation under the Merida Initiative, the Millennium Challenge Compact and CAFTA as positive aspects of the relationship. Zelaya said he was looking forward to attending the Summit of the Americas and stressed the great interest the Central American leaders had in meeting separately with President Obama in Trinidad. Zelaya said Honduras was fully engaged in preparations for the OAS General Assembly scheduled for June 1-2 in San Pedro Sula. He said his government was keen on hosting Secretary Clinton and hoped that her schedule would permit some time for a few bilateral events. End summary.

¶2. (C) On March 30, the Ambassador had an opportunity to review the current state of U.S. relations, as well as discuss regional developments in a one-on-one lunch at the Residence with President Zelaya. We will also provide a separate message on the discussion of the domestic political situation.

Vice President Biden's Meeting with Central American Leaders

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¶3. (C) Zelaya provided a read out of the Central America leaders meeting held in Managua on March 25. He lamented the inability of the Central American leaders to achieve a consensus that would have convinced SICA President Daniel Ortega to participate in the meeting with Vice President Biden. Zelaya reiterated the view that President Arias had failed to coordinate the meeting with the Central American

leaders or with Ortega and that he had received the first notice of the meeting in a written invitation from the Costa Rican government to attend the meeting on March 30. He and Ortega had suggested various additions to the agenda that had been rejected by Arias. He added that personal differences and animosity between Presidents Ortega and Arias had made the situation worse. Under these circumstances, Zelaya had made the decision not to attend the meeting in San Jose.

Nevertheless, he welcomed the U.S. initiative and presence of Vice President Biden and had directed Vice President Mejia to participate in a positive manner. He noted that he had also instructed his staff to pass on Mejia's talking points and statement to the U.S. government several days before the meeting to underscore that the Honduran participation would be constructive. He said Mejia had been instructed to convey Honduran appreciation for U.S. development assistance, particularly the Millennium Challenge Compact, which he believed was a model of development cooperation. He said Mejia had also been instructed to also raise positive elements such as our common work to combat international crime under the Merida Initiative and the promise of closer economic ties provided by CAFTA. He said that immigration was of strategic importance and hoped that the U.S. would slowdown deportations of Hondurans, consider providing permanent resident status to TPS Hondurans and promote a guest worker pilot program for rural workers.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador conveyed our disappointment that President Zelaya had not attended the meeting with Vice President Biden. The Ambassador stressed that the Vice President's mission to South and Central America was important in terms of giving new direction and focus to U.S. relations with the region. He said the Vice President had come to listen and to hear about the region's concerns and

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priorities and begin to develop a common agenda of work based on shared interests. He said the meeting in San Jose was particularly important as the hemisphere's leaders prepared for the Summit of the Americas on April 17-19 in Trinidad. The Ambassador said his absence had been a missed opportunity for him to establish a personal relationship with the Vice President and to be at the table and directly convey Honduran views on the key issues of managing the global financial crisis, confronting the threat of international crime and dealing with immigration. The Ambassador conveyed his appreciation for providing us Vice President Mejia's talking points.

The Summit of the Americas

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¶5. (C) President Zelaya said he was looking forward to the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad. He said that he planned to participate in a meeting of Bolivian Alternative for the Americas ALBA members just prior to the Summit. He assumed that the other ALBA countries would attend but emphasized that even if Presidents Chavez, Morales, Correa and Ortega chose not to go to Trinidad, he was committed to participating. He said that the Central American leaders had requested a meeting with President Obama. Such a meeting was critically important to the Central Americans as underscoring U.S. interest and support for Central America and its process of integration. If this meeting did not happen it would send a negative signal to the region of U.S. disinterest. Zelaya said he believed that U.S. Presidents had met with Central American counterparts in every other Summit, including President Bush's meeting during the Mar del Plata Summit in ¶2005. Zelaya said it was positive that President Obama had already met with Presidents Calderon, Lula and Prime Minister Harper. Zelaya also suggested that more be done to try to minimize friction with Chavez on the eve of the Summit. He understood that a U.S. President was unlikely to seek a bilateral meeting with Chavez, but he believed that a phone call prior to the Summit would be helpful in easing tensions and making for a more positive Summit.

¶ 6. (C) The Ambassador responded that President Obama was also looking forward to the Trinidad Summit as a great opportunity to forge a common agenda with the hemisphere's leaders. The G-20 Summit on April 2 was also an opportunity to improve coordination by the major economies of the world in dealing with the global financial crisis. The participation of the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina in London would allow for a substantive exchange of views on the economic crisis in Trinidad and a chance to begin developing common actions and solutions. The Ambassador stressed the importance of ensuring that the multilateral banks were particularly responsive and supportive of poor countries in the region. He said that any creative initiatives or mechanisms, some of which would be discussed with Vice President Biden in San Jose, could be developed in Trinidad.

OAS General Assembly

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¶ 7. (C) Zelaya said that he was confident that the OAS General Assembly scheduled for June 1-2 in San Pedro Sula would go well. He said much work was being done on the logistical side to ensure that the event went smoothly. On the policy side, Honduras wanted to avoid any diplomatic confrontation. He said dealing in a constructive way on the issue of Cuba would be important. Honduras understood that President Obama had limitations on how far he could go on Cuba. However, the more flexibility the U.S. could show on Cuba the better it would be received by Latin Americans.  
(Note: The Honduran government is seeking to include language in the declaration that would abrogate the resolution of 1963 that expelled or excluded Cuba from OAS

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deliberations. The Hondurans claim that this will not/not result in the reincorporating Cuba back into the OAS, and that the Cuban government has also made clear they have no interest in becoming a member.). Zelaya said that the Honduran government and people were eager and enthusiastic about welcoming Secretary Clinton to Honduras. He said he was very interested in scheduling a bilateral portion to her visit. In addition to his bilateral meeting with the Secretary, Zelaya suggested a visit to a Merida Initiative crime prevention project that involved U.S. and Hondurans working together to promote community policing and assistance to at-risk youth.

¶ 8. (C) The Ambassador said that the Obama Administration was seeking to reach out to Cuba and strengthen contact between the U.S. and the island. He said travel restrictions and financial flows were being eased, and that we were looking at ways to improve two-way contact and communication. However, the embargo was unlikely to be lifted any time soon. The Ambassador cited recent statements by Vice President Biden in this regard. He said that it was not a one-way street and that Cuba needed to demonstrate to its people and the international community that it was willing to open up. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. objective of supporting democracy and human rights in Cuba would remain an important element of U.S. policy in the region. The Ambassador agreed to pass on to the Department his request that there be a bilateral segment of visit to Honduras, noting that the Secretary's schedule would be very tight.

LLORENS